TL-15 – Develop Congestion Pricing Programs

Benefit/Cost of reducing CO_2e:

N/A

Assessment: Medium Priority. Bin A. 19 out of 22 votes.

This policy option involves establishing congestion pricing to discourage vehicle use during peak times or along constrained transportation routes. Examples of such programs include toll roads, toll bridges, and high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes.

In September 2006, the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) began operation of the Utah Express Lanes program, a HOT lane congestion pricing program allowed by the passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005. Express Lanes program customers pay a monthly fee in exchange for HOT lane privileges. In the near future, this payment scheme will be replaced by a more sophisticated system that will provide customers real-time prices based on the level of congestion along the Express Lanes route. Those who opt to use the Express Lanes facility will be charged via a transponder device onboard their vehicle. UDOT estimates that it cost approximately $12.5 to initiate this program. Ongoing program expenses are offset with program revenues.

While such a program will likely yield peak and route congestion benefits, it is unclear whether it would result in robust GHG emissions reduction benefits. For example, drivers may simply opt to shift their travel to off-peak periods or may choose alternate routes. In either scenario, vehicle miles traveled would not necessarily decrease, and – as a result – GHG emissions would not be reduced. However, these programs could result in greater efficiency of the highway system and associated carbon benefits. As a result, careful program design is critical to the successful implementation of a congestion pricing program aimed at reducing GHG emissions.